Unit .32

Session .02

The Church Is Sent to the World

Scripture

Acts 13:1-12

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets
and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger,
Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod
the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** As they were worshiping the
Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for
me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have
called them." **3** Then after they had fasted, prayed,
and laid hands on them, they sent them off. **4** So
being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down
to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.
5 Arriving in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of
God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as
their assistant. **6** When they had traveled the whole
island as far as Paphos, they came across a sorcerer, a
Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. **7** He was with
the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This
man summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear
the word of God. **8** But Elymas the sorcerer (that is the
meaning of his name) opposed them and tried to turn
the proconsul away from the faith. **9** But Saul—also
called Paul—filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight
at Elymas **10** and said, "You are full of all kinds of
deceit and trickery, you son of the devil and enemy
of all that is right. Won't you ever stop perverting the
straight paths of the Lord? **11** Now, look, the Lord's
hand is against you. You are going to be blind, and
will not see the sun for a time." Immediately a mist
and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking
someone to lead him by the hand. **12** Then, when he
saw what happened, the proconsul believed, because he
was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

Option 1

Tell your students to imagine they've been entrusted to share a certain message with as many people as possible in the most powerful, effective way possible. The content of the message doesn't really matter; it could be to drink a certain drink or the quadratic equation or a "roses are red" poem. To get their message out, they have unlimited options, but they can only choose one strategy. Crazy sci-fi or magic possibilities are on the table. For example, they could telepathically contact everyone in the world; they could make the message appear on every screen in the world at the same time; they could make it appear in the clouds. What means would they use, and why would they pick that medium?

Give them a moment to think and then ask as many students as are willing to share. Why do they think some methods are more effective than others?

See if anyone chooses word-of-mouth or sending out ambassadors (anything close to sending out missionaries). Point out to them that, as we'll see in today's lesson, God could have used any means [illegible] message of the kingdom, but He has ordained that it be carried through [illegible]e it is that He has appointed us to join Him in His glorious work!

Your students should pretend they work for an advertising agency producing generic ads that any company can then purchase and tweak to fit their own product or service. They've been instructed to create their next template: "Be a part of something special." This template will encourage people to join a particular organization or encourage those already in the organization to be more loyal. Students can create a radio ad, a poster, or a video commercial. Just keep the ad generic enough that any group, from a baseball team to a music group fan club could use it.

Let the students prepare and then share their generic ads. Debrief which tactics they used. Did they appeal to guilt? To a sense of family and belonging? To self-promotion? To happiness?

In today's session, we'll see that God commands His church to go to all nations as missionaries. This command holds for all Christians. Just like your students' advertisements invited people to promote loyalty to an organization, Jesus invites us to be part of the expansion of the kingdom of God, either by going ourselves or by sending others.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 13:1-2.

Although the church leaders at Antioch were diverse in many ways, they were unified in the gospel of Jesus Christ. United under one Lord, we find them worshiping and fasting together in the opening verses of Acts 13.

Fasting is giving up something you love for someone you love more. It typically involves giving up some kind of food, although some may give up other things for a season as well (like TV or social media). It is a physical way of expressing a hunger for God and a longing to be filled with Him. Fasting demonstrates a dependence upon God to sustain and satisfy you. As such, fasting is often coupled with an increase in prayer and worship. That spiritual context makes us more sensitive to hear God's voice and follow His direction.

- **Why do you think there is a relationship between fasting and hearing God's voice more clearly in our lives?**

It was in the church's worship and fasting that God spoke to them. Was this a coincidence? Of course not. There is a correlation between our spiritual practices and our sensitivity to God's voice. That should not surprise us, as God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

Read Acts 13:3-8.

When God spoke, these Christians responded with action. Stories like this must have inspired men like William Carey and Andrew Fuller, who ignited a missionary movement in the 19th century. It was through the reading and study of God's Word that Carey and Fuller came to the conviction that every church and every believer was commissioned by Jesus Christ to share the gospel, even (and especially) those who lived in the outermost parts of the earth. Some Christians may be called to support and send while others may be called to go. Either way, we all have a role to play in the Great Commission.

- **How can we support missionaries God has sent?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

Mission of the Church

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

Acts 13

13:1-2. "Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible. In nothing is man more closely connected with the world of sense than in this need for, and enjoyment of, food. It was the fruit with which man was tempted and fell in Paradise. It was with bread that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. But He triumphed in fasting…"[1]

"So the call takes place during a time of spiritual focus on God... Worship and prayer appear side by side as key tasks of the church. In sum, prayer and spiritual forces work together in this text and play a role in guiding the church."[2]

"That they were fasting indicates the church was in a particular mood of expectancy and openness to the Lord's leading."[3]

13:4. "We build churches not just to go in for worship, but also to go out with God's heart for people."[4]

Activity

Numerous pastors have pointed out that when it comes to missionary endeavors, Christians only have three options: they can go, they can send, or they can be disobedient. Have your students create three-part pamphlets or posters showing one of those three options: going, sending, or being disobedient (doing neither).

There's one more stipulation: students' work should focus on either how or why. If they choose how, their pamphlet should show how a middle school aged Christian can go, send, or be disobedient. Think of this pamphlet as something they could give to a new Christian to help him or her understand the options when it comes to missionary work.

If they choose why, their three sections should focus on why a middle school aged Christian would go, send, or be disobedient. Their reasons should include Jesus. For example, a middle schooler might go on a mission trip in order to experience Jesus more; she might send because she realizes how Jesus was sent from heaven for us; she might be disobedient because she fails to realize Jesus is more satisfying than the comforts and complacency of the status quo.

See what they come up with and debrief by pointing out particularly helpful comments. Discuss how and why they can go or send in the next few weeks.

1. Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1981).
2. Darrell L. Bock, Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids (Mich.), MI: Baker Academic, 2007).
3. John B. Polhill, Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary), vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub Group, 2011).
4. Darrell L. Bock, Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids (Mich.), MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

In Defense (p. 58, DDG)

When we live for God's mission, it is inevitable that we will face challenges and opposition. In those seasons, knowing that you have been sent by the God of the universe is an anchor and a rock. Navigating moments of doubt and discouragement would be impossible if you were going merely out of your own ambition or because your church sent you. When you have been set apart and set by God, though, you can persevere knowing that you are there by God's providence, plan, and purpose.

TEACHING PLAN

You can't act upon what you don't know, so the first step is to discover how your church is already involved in missions. If your church has missionaries from your own congregation, get their names, stories, and locations. Pray for them, and if possible, contact the missionaries for ways to support them. Make a goal as a group and try to raise an offering to give toward missions. God is a sending God, and His church should be a sending church.

- **What can we expect to happen when we obey the Great Commission?**

Paul and Barnabas gave us a great example of what missions should look like and what we can expect as we live out God's mission. Following God's calling, they were sent out from their church. Upon arrival, they began to proclaim the Word of God—not their ideas or agenda, but God's Word. Starting with Jewish synagogues, they took the gospel throughout the region as much as they possibly could—"they had traveled the whole island" (Acts 13:6).

Along the way, various responses were encountered. Some, like Sergius Paulus, were interested and open to the gospel, while others, like Bar-Jesus, opposed them. This should be expected for anyone who lives on God's mission. We should expect that God is working in people's hearts and preparing them to receive His word, while Satan and sin are at work in other people to oppose God's mission.

Read Acts 13:9-12

If we are going to have the courage to fulfill God's mission, we must be filled with the Spirit. In our flesh, we might say the wrong thing at the wrong time with the wrong tone. Sometimes the situation calls for gentle persuasion, while other times it calls for direct confrontation. In Paul's case, it called for the latter, but we would never be able to rightly discern what each moment calls for apart from the Holy Spirit.

- **What can we learn from Paul's courage with Elymas? What stands out to you about what Paul told him?**

Paul didn't talk behind his opponent's back, nor did he become cowardly. Rather, Paul knew that God had sent him and was with him. Paul was walking in the truth, and that gave him courage to face his opponent without fear. When he did speak with boldness, Paul didn't make it about himself. Instead, he focused on the truth.

- **What are some ways that you can be bold in standing for what is right and true?**

Without being overly alarmist about it, we can acknowledge that truth is (and has been since Genesis 3) under attack. Elymas was a "son of the devil" because he was "full of all kinds of deceit" (Acts 13:10). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), but Jesus calls us to bear witness to the truth because the truth has power to free people from Satan's deception (John 8:32, 2 Cor. 4:4-6). Standing for the truth takes courage.

But Paul wasn't merely standing for truth for the sake of argument. He wasn't looking for a fight, as many do today. Rather, Paul wanted the proconsul to believe in Christ. His motivation was for the lost to be freed from the grip of Satan and his evil schemes, not to win a debate. We must be careful to check our motives as we seek to be a people who stand for the truth. Are we more concerned with winning a debate or winning people to Christ?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

Acts 13

13:5. That Paul always begins with Jewish synagogues demonstrates two things. First, the apostles did not see themselves as starting a new religion; rather, they viewed Jesus and the gospel as the fulfillment of the religion which followed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Put simply, Christianity is true Judaism—that was the apostles' appeal to Jews in Jerusalem and beyond. Second, it shows that although the good news had spread into the Gentile world, God's heart had always been to bring Jews into the church of Jesus Christ. The inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 10 was never meant to exclude Jews from the covenant people. Paul was broken-hearted to see that the people who had "the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises" were "cut off from Christ" (Rom. 9:2-5).

"If it is the duty of all men, when the gospel comes, to believe unto salvation, then it is the duty of those who are entrusted with the gospel to endeavor to make it known among all nations for the obedience of faith."[5]

13:9-12. Elymas was a Jewish false prophet. Paul and Barnabas were Jewish believers, and they started their mission by preaching in Jewish synagogues. Some of the great opposition to the gospel is not from the secular world, but from within religious communities. Jesus, the apostles, and the early church's greatest opposition came not from the Roman culture, but from Jewish opposition. Yes, they faced opposition on both sides, but the fiercest opposition came from their own countrymen. It is critical that we stand against Satan's deception, both secular and religious.

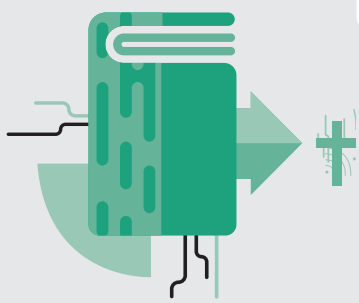
"In v.9 Luke identified Saul by his Roman name, 'who was also called Paul.' From this point on, the name Paul appears, whereas before it had been 'Saul.' Polhill notes that 'Paul' is his Roman name, and since his mission now led him to the Gentile, Roman world, that is the name the apostle would be known for in his ministry. He also notes the shift from this point on from 'Barnabas and Saul' to 'Paul and Barnabas,' and later to 'Paul and his companions.' It is at this junction that Paul has assumed primary leadership of the Christian mission in the Gentile world."[6]

5. Andrew Fuller, The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller: with a Memoir of His Life, by Andrew Gunton Fuller: Reprinted from the Third London Edition (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845).

6. John B. Polhill, Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary), vol. 26 (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub Group, 2011).

(p. 57, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus told His disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church, reminding us that God's people are on offense, continuing the mission Jesus began. God's plan is for missionaries to take the powerful, good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness with confidence that Jesus will build His church.



SENT TO THE WORLD

God sends missionaries from the church to take the gospel to the entire world.

JESUS CONNECTION

Jesus told His disciples that the power of Satan would not overcome His church. God's people are called to continue the mission Jesus began through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can take the good news of Jesus to places of deep spiritual darkness with confidence, knowing that Jesus will build His church.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

BOLDNESS – Choosing to do the right thing, even if you are afraid.

HEAD

What were Saul and Barnabus doing before God set them apart to share the gospel in other places?

How did Saul respond when Elymas opposed the good news about Jesus? Where did Saul's message for Elymas come from?

HEART

The Holy Spirit chose Saul and Barnabus to tell people about Jesus. How does knowing that the same Spirit calls each of Jesus' disciples to share the gospel help you to be bold in sharing your faith?

Saul was totally convinced about the truth of Jesus he was sent to share. Why is it easier to be bold when you are sure of what you're saying? What happens when you aren't sure about what you're sharing?

HANDS

Boldness means choosing to do what is right, even when someone disagrees with you or you're afraid. We cheer on the hero of our favorite stories for being bold in hard situations, but it's not easy to do it in real life. Consider the examples below and decide how you could respond boldly by standing for what is right in each one.

- The captain of your sports team asks to copy your answers on the homework sheet he didn't get finished last night

- During a class discussion about world religions, the teacher asks for someone to explain what Christians believe about Jesus

- Another student is pestering a kid in your class who doesn't have a lot of friends